Having described the invention, what is claimed is:

1. A ball ramp actuator for use as a locking mechanism, the actuator comprising:

a first cam plate having at least one groove providing a non-circumferential ball ramp;

a second cam plate rotatable with respect to the first cam plate, and having at least one groove providing a non-circumferential ball ramp, the ball ramp of the second cam plate intersecting with the ball ramp of the first cam plate when viewed axially;

a ball positioned between the first and second cam plates, in the grooves of the first and second cam plates; and

biasing means for biasing the ball radially to ensure that the ball follows the non-circumferential ball ramps of both cam plates in response to relative rotation of the two cam plates.

2. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the grooves become shallower as they extend radially outward such that radially outward movement of the ball spreads the cam plates apart.

3. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the biasing means comprises a ball retainer in contact with the ball and having resiliently deformable portions that serve as integral springs.

4. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the biasing means comprises a ball retainer with a pocket within which the ball is located.

5. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the biasing means comprises a ball retainer with a flexible arm in contact with the ball.

6. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the biasing menas comprises a ball retainer with a concave surface in contact with the ball such that the ball is centered with respect to the ball retainer.

7. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the biasing means comprises a ball retainer made of an elastically deformable polymer.

8. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the number of balls is three.

9. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the number of balls is more than three.

10. A ball ramp actuator according to claim 1, wherein the grooves include at least one spherical recess to provide a detent for maintaining the ball in a locked or unlocked position.